

A RESPONSE TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

**The Revolution in
Peru is Profoundly
Liberating**
Yankee Talk of "Human Rights"
is a Cover for Intervention

**The Committee to Support
the Revolution in Peru**
August 1992

The Revolution in Peru is Profoundly Liberating

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Introduction

Picture this:

*A Latin American revolution rises powerfully from remote mountain and jungle villages, from immense shantytowns, from occupied universities. It is rooted among indigenous people who have never tasted justice in their entire lives, and who have suffered like this for centuries. The revolution threatens to win. It has clearly stated that it aims to expropriate the massive U.S. investments in key sections of the economy, and it threatens to spread to neighboring countries. In response, the U.S. government arms and "advises" the viciously repressive government, which then cancels the constitution. The U.S. State Department shrieks about the "human rights violations" of the rebels, in a calculated attempt to gain public support for U.S. intervention and to justify and cover over atrocities against the peasantry. **And the most prestigious and respected human rights organization in the world takes up its own campaign against the rebels, paralleling the themes and even the language of the State Department.***

This is what Amnesty International (AI) is doing right now in relation to Peru?

AI is not ignorant of the basic realities of Peru. It has condemned government atrocities in Peru for some years. In November 1991, AI issued a major report on Peru, and called for a year-long campaign around Peru in 1992. The report includes exposure of the atrocious human rights record of the Peruvian army and the Peruvian government. AI has also issued more recent reports that address human rights in Peru.

Unfortunately, the November 1991 report, and the other work that AI has done around Peru, has made a major point of attacking the revolution in Peru, the Maoist people's war

Peru, particularly the peasantry, suffer human rights violations from each side, and are "caught between two fires"—i.e., that the Peruvian government and the revolutionaries are equal oppressors and tormentors of the people.

This approach is not based on investigation, but on profound bias and prejudice against the ideology and strategy of the PCP, and against the brutally oppressed section of Peruvian society which makes up the backbone of the revolution. It objectively serves the interests of the U.S. government, which is now maneuvering to find politically expedient ways to justify military intervention in Peru.

In recent Congressional testimony, State Department representative Bernard Aronson said that "the international community and respected human rights organizations must focus the spotlight of world attention on the threat which Sendero poses." Unfortunately, AI is acting in concert with this demand of the U.S. government.

Because AI is widely recognized as setting standards on human rights, and has some influence among people who would otherwise know better than to believe the U.S. government when it talks about things like "human rights," we in the Committee to Support the Revolution in Peru (CSRP) are issuing this response to Amnesty on Peru. We see this also as a challenge to all who want to stand against oppression. To a significant degree, the oppressed people of Peru will judge the people of the U.S. by this: how well we are able to see through the lies and slanders, stand up against pressure and threats, and develop a powerful movement in opposition to U.S. intervention in Peru and in support of the revolution.

The Committee to Support the Revolution in Peru
Berkeley, California
August 1992

In April of 1992, there was a military-backed coup in Peru, and the situation in that country leaped onto the front pages of the press in the U.S. in a way that it never had before. With the coup came cancellation of the Peruvian constitution, dismantling of the Peruvian judiciary, and complete suspension of all basic legal rights for the people. While leaders of some of the legal parties in opposition to President Fujimori were detained briefly, at bottom the coup was an attempt by the ruling classes in Peru (backed by the U.S.) to pull themselves together to defeat the revolutionary people's war led by the Communist Party of Peru. The coup meant greater centralization of military and police

countryside, there has been a state of emergency for years, and the coup made little immediate difference in those places.)

This coup came not long after the U.S. government and media had launched what could best be described as a "human rights" propaganda offensive against the revolution. In Congressional testimony on March 12, 1992, Bernard Aronson, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, said that "Latin America has seen violence and terror, but none like Sendero's . . ." and "Make no mistake, if Sendero were to take power, we would see this century's third genocide." (The U.S. State Department defines the first two genocides as Nazi Germany and Cambodia in the 1970s. This is self-serving to say the least. There is only one country in the world that has even made a childhood game of genocide, and that game is cowboys and Indians.)

This "human rights" propaganda offensive of the U.S. has lately become a major form of political attack on the revolution in Peru. This is aimed particularly at broad progressive sections of the population, liberal church groups, supporters of human rights, etc., as a way to gain the "moral high ground" for U.S. intervention and government policy in general. Before this, the "war on drugs" was the "official story" justifying and covering for U.S. military intervention, and this is still the framework for much U.S. aid. Under the "war on drugs," with the PCP painted as dread "narco-terrorists," the U.S. built up military firebases in zones that are strongholds of the rebels, sent in Green Berets on "training missions," and overall begun to open up a whole new level of relations with the Peruvian government and military. More recently, again under the cover of the "war on drugs," the U.S. built up a massive high-tech infrastructure in the Caribbean and in South America. This is similar to the kind of infrastructure built up in Saudi Arabia and used as a command and control center for the war against Iraq. [1](#) But the lies behind the "war on drugs" have become increasingly exposed—things have reached the point where even pillars of the establishment like the New York Times have run articles denying alleged drug-trafficking of the PCP, and exposing the Peruvian government's thorough corruption and financial dependence [2](#) on the drug trade.

Some in power clearly feel at this point that the "war on drugs" alone is not going to serve well enough as the cause to rally support among key sections of the people for a war on Latin American peasants. [3](#) The revolution has been making powerful advances that require increasingly drastic action from the U.S. and the Peruvian government if there is to be any chance of stopping the revolution. [4](#) While it is not clear exactly what and when the U.S. will do militarily, in the realm of public opinion they have increasingly focussed on their "human rights" offensive. Bernard Aronson has been acting as a point man in this process. This offensive was especially designed to terrify and horrify the middle classes in the United States and Europe. using this to iustify in

"third genocide of this century" were quickly echoed throughout the mainstream press in the U.S., and repeated over and over again after both the coup and after the Peruvian government's massacre of political prisoners in Canto Grande prison in May.

As touched on in our introduction, in his Congressional testimony Aronson said that "respected" human rights organizations "must focus the spotlight of world attention on the threat which Sendero poses." AI was already going in this direction. Last fall, at a major international conference in Japan, Amnesty International (AI) decided that it would put greater emphasis than in the past on criticizing and attacking revolution, in the form of "equally" criticizing revolutionaries and the counter-insurgency measures of reactionary states. [5](#) Although this was announced as a general policy, the revolution in Peru is clearly the main, if not the only, current target.

And in fact, not long after the announcement, when President Fujimori of Peru toured the U.S., AI took the unprecedented step of holding a protest demonstration against Revolution Books in Berkeley, which carries the literature of the PCP (and the CSRP, as well as other kinds of revolutionary and progressive literature). In discussions with AI, the CSRP was told that this demonstration was the first attempt to apply the new AI policy. Consistent with its shoddy methods in dealing with substantive issues related to the revolution in Peru, AI identified Revolution Books in a press release as the "office of the PCP," which is not true, and which is the kind of accusation which, as AI should know, can open up bookstores and political organizations to investigation and harassment by the FBI and/or other political police. [6](#) AI issued a written retraction, but later repeated essentially the same false statement in a national newsletter. [7](#) To people who see AI as a champion of those who are repressed and persecuted, how incongruous it must be to see it turning its fire against supporters of a people's liberation movement.

As an expression of the extreme repression the state has been carrying out, the coup in Peru and the massacre of the Canto Grande prisoners was an important juncture for AI. How far would it go in carrying out this orientation of criticizing the revolution "equally" with the repressive government? It has gone pretty far. For example, in a leaflet which was publicly distributed in Berkeley shortly after the coup, AI briefly criticized the coup, but mainly criticized the revolution. AI has made some criticism of what happened after the coup, and it did issue an Urgent Action Alert following the government's vicious murder of political prisoners in Canto Grande prison. At least AI feels that the massacre of political prisoners deserves condemnation! But as Aronson made clear in his speech to the Congress, the State Department considers that human rights organizations like AI can contribute more to "demonizing" the revolution if they also make at least some criticism of the most atrocious crimes of the Peruvian government. [8](#)

who would never expect Amnesty to essentially march in line with "orders" from the U.S. State Department. We would ask such people to take a careful, and critical, look at the way AI is approaching the situation in Peru. The new "equal criticism of both the rebels and the reactionary regime" position of AI is most fully expressed in their major report on Peru, "Peru: Human Rights in a Climate of Terror," issued in November of 1991. We will focus our main attention in this pamphlet on analyzing and assessing this report. Peru: people's war is the only solution

AI often does important exposure of the abuses of reactionary governments, and this is true of their 1991 document as well. Here is a list in outline form of some of the key things AI exposes:

- For years, much of the country has been in a "state of emergency"; over 20,000 people have been killed in political violence which AI admits is principally the work of the security forces.
- Under the state of emergency, which has been applied mainly to the sections of the countryside where the revolution has its strength, the military and police can: enter and search homes without warrant or warning; eliminate the right to assembly; and carry out detentions without warrant.
- The government has tried to restrict and control the movement of peasants in the countryside, using checkpoints, safe conduct passes, etc.
- Beyond what is "legal" under the state of emergency, disappearances, extrajudicial executions and torture are extremely common, and have been for years; this started when the emergency zones were first set up in the early 1980s in the area around Ayacucho, when thousands of people "disappeared"; since the late 1980s, such conduct has been common in non-emergency areas as well, including Lima. These things are done by regular police as well as government-sponsored death squads.
- Women have been repeatedly raped by security forces. For peasant women, and especially those accused of being revolutionaries, this is almost automatic when they are arrested. But it is not restricted to revolutionary women. Wives of "disappeared" human rights workers have been raped as a way to keep them quiet. Peasant girls as young as eight years of age have been raped, then killed.
- In the countryside, during the nine years that the Peruvian army has been involved in counterinsurgency, the AI document #notes that "the term 'subversive' has increasingly come to be applied to all inhabitants of areas where Sendero Luminoso has a strong presence or some degree of control. The presumption that entire communities may be considered collectively responsible for Sendero Luminoso actions has been invoked in justification of what amounts to a policy of indiscriminate killing and 'disappearance.'" Entire villages have been massacred under this doctrine of "collective responsibility." This has happened repeatedly, and over a period of many years.

- The military has often tried to make it appear as if its own mass murders are the work of revolutionaries. The army will leave behind fake #notes and PCP literature, dress like members of the People's Guerrilla Army (PGA—the revolutionary army led by the PCP), paint phony revolutionary graffiti, etc., when it carries out grisly atrocities.
- In rural areas, "civil defense patrols," called *rondas*, controlled and often recruited under threat by the military, have been organized to attack the revolutionaries, and often have been engaged in terrorizing villages. Sometimes these groups have been forced by the security forces to attack the PGA, which then counterattacks. The media then claims "another Sendero massacre of peasants." The military has frequently killed, disappeared, raped and tortured villagers who refuse to join *rondas*. [Note: this is not mentioned in the AI report, but recently there have been moves to form urban *rondas*, using the same methods as in the countryside, but also involving some of the political parties of the legal left who are joining up with the government to lead armed attacks.]
- University students and professors and staff have been a particular target for being arrested, tortured, disappeared and executed without trial.
- Human rights investigators have been forced out of the emergency zones, or killed by the government. Journalists have been killed by death squads for exposing the military. The office of AI in Peru was bombed in March 1990.
- Members and supporters of the "legal left" parties, unions, and other groups have also been arrested, tortured, disappeared and executed without trial.
- The military has had almost total impunity for gross human rights violations. There are only a few cases in the last 10 years when security forces have had any charges brought against them. In one of these, 47 men, women and children were killed in a village in the department of Ayacucho. 14 members of the Civil Guard were tried and convicted—and sentenced to suspended sentences ranging from 3 months to one year. They were not even suspended from active service.
- *Habeas corpus* is one of the most fundamental guarantees provided by the Peruvian legal system (*habeas corpus* means that the police and prison system must produce people that they are holding upon petition to a court; this means that "disappearances" are illegal). It supposedly holds even in a state of emergency, but it is routinely denied by judges and the judicial system, and almost never granted.
- The government has claimed (February 1991) that its human rights violations are the "consequences of mistakes and excesses." The truth is that "collective responsibility" is an operational military doctrine. There has been public exposure of written policy directives which back up this doctrine, e.g., one military document which was leaked to a national television program, calling for troops to "carry out killings without a trace." and not to take prisoners.

of the constitution and formal dismantling of the judiciary. Looking over these points as a whole, it is possible to get a basic picture of the counterrevolution in Peru. To many people, this picture alone provides a very eloquent and powerful argument for the need for armed revolution if there is to be any justice at all, let alone basic change. It also offers a powerful argument AGAINST relying on the Peruvian political system to effect any kind of basic change—the kind of change that would actually *end* the conditions that cause one in ten Peruvian children to die before the age of five from diseases linked to poverty and malnutrition. AI is clearly not ignorant of the extreme brutality and viciousness of the Peruvian government. Its basic response to this has been to condemn the viciousness, and then to make two points: (1) the people's war is equally vicious; and (2) to uphold the basic right of the government to wage counterinsurgency if it is "*clean*."

Amnesty International is thoroughly biased against the revolution

In the mainstream press in the U.S., it is virtually a requirement that every article refer at least once, if not repeatedly, to the "terrorist Shining Path," or the "brutal insurgency." This serves to hammer into people's minds an image of the PCP as an isolated group which carries out violent acts against the people. It has little to do with what is actually happening in the revolution, and a lot to do with the kind of picture of the revolution that helps pave the way for support for U.S. intervention and for leaps in U.S. military aid. The AI report bolsters this basic view. To begin to get a picture of how distorted this picture is, it is worth looking at the views of an important counterinsurgency expert on Peru, the chief analyst on Peru at the RAND corporation:

The often heard claim that SL is nothing more than a "terrorist" organization that does not and cannot pose a viable threat to the central government of Peru is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the insurgency and the underlying dynamics of Shining Path activities. Sendero's operations, which have increased regularly since 1980, are the product of a much more extensive set of political and social networks that exist beneath the surface of large segments of Peruvian society. Between 25 and 40 percent of Peru is now estimated to have come under either open or shadow Sendero administration. Collectively, this administration represents an attempt to build an institutional alternative to the State. It is this presence, which serves as the basis of the guerrilla military position, rather than their militant actions *per se*, that poses the greatest long term threat to the central government . . . [9](#)

This helps reveal some of what is going on in the revolution. The network of organization he is talking about is concentrated in what the PCP calls "base areas" of the revolution.

which represents the beginning rule of the oppressed themselves. In many of these areas, power is exercised by Open People's Committees, which are made up of a combination of the peasants, especially poor peasants, the middle classes, and the PCP. Those who think that the revolution has built up this kind of organization by terrorizing the masses should consider that the revolution started with almost no arms at all, and has gotten the overwhelming majority of what arms it has by taking them from the Peruvian army and police. It has received no foreign military aid. No genuine revolutionary movement in history has advanced by terrorizing the masses, though this is always the charge of the counterrevolution. Chairman Gonzalo, the leader of the PCP, commented on this in 1988:

"... [W]e can conclude that those whose reasoning is colored by desperation because the earth is trembling beneath their feet wish to charge us with terrorism in order to hide the people's war. But this people's war is so earthshaking that they themselves admit that it is of *national dimensions* and that it has become the principal problem facing the Peruvian State. What terrorism could do that? None." [10](#)

In Peru, the truth is that the revolution has terrorized the oppressors of the peasants, the police and the army most of all; it has rallied the peasants to rise up, break the power of the landlords, take over the land, abolish centuries of feudal degradation, and set out to build a new society. It has shown an uncompromising determination to not quit until the people of Peru are really free, and to stand firmly at the same time for revolution worldwide. This story from the *New York Times* in the mid 1980s about an imprisoned woman reveals the kind of political awakening of the basic people that is at the heart of the strength the revolution has shown:

In Peru's traditional society, many people have been shocked by the fact that women have not only joined the guerrillas but at times have reportedly led attacks. Holding her baby, born in jail two months earlier, Lilian Torres, 23 years old, said she had worked as a maid and street vendor in Lima since she was 17. She had been afraid at first "to join the party," she said, but became aware of her responsibility when she learned about "the class struggle" and the "offensive of the world revolution" taking place in Peru. "Now I am happier," she said. "I have stopped being a vegetable." [11](#)

In its 1991 report, AI hardly bothers to say *anything* about what the PCP really is or what it is doing. AI doesn't even bother to get the name of the PCP straight. [12](#) The method that AI uses in making its case about the human rights "crimes" of the PCP is consistent with the way it treats the group overall. While the atrocities of the Peruvian government in the

mainstream press overall with its litany of "terrorism": the AI report repeats over and over again in a scattershot way throughout the report that "Sendero" commits such and such crimes. For example, a detailed section on the *army and police* "disappearances" of people in the emergency zones is concluded by a quote from an unnamed source who says, "If the authorities don't eliminate us, we are eliminated by *Sendero Luminoso* . . ."

[13](#) Another example comes on the first page of the report, where it says that "thousands of people have been killed by Sendero Luminoso, who frequently torture their captives and subject them to mock trials before killing them, in a parody of justice." The Peruvian "Senate Special Commission on Violence" is repeatedly cited as the source of this kind of information. Giving credibility to this kind of "body count," made by the Peruvian government's own Senate committee, is ludicrous.

There is a three-page section (pages 22–25) in the 70-page report where AI attempts to give a more systematic account of PCP "crimes." Again there is almost no evidence. People should ask why, if these charges and others like them throughout the AI report are true and AI takes them seriously, is there so little attempt to document them? We think that anyone who really investigates will find that this kind of documentation cannot be done because the charges of terrorizing *the people* are not true. But here we will respond briefly to the main "charges" that AI brings against the PCP in that section (we will later respond in more depth to some of the most controversial questions).

CHARGE: *The revolution sabotages public utilities and destroys the livestock and produce of peasant communities earmarked for sale in the cities.*

The PCP does attack things like electrical towers, bridges and other parts of the infrastructure in the countryside. It does this because that infrastructure: (1) serves counter-revolution, including the ability of the army to move and bring military force to bear in the countryside; (2) serves development based on exploitation and impoverishment of the peasantry, development which serves the cities and foreign capital. Poor peasants led by the PCP have taken over land and livestock which are controlled by and serve that kind of development, and in its place established relatively self-sufficient agriculture based on redistribution of land to the poorest peasants.

CHARGE: *"Community leaders" and local officials have been killed in the countryside.*

The Spanish imposed a feudal system on the remnants of the Inca Empire nearly 500 years ago. The "community leaders" and officials that the revolution targets are the people who today fight to prop up the remnants of that system in the countryside, and/or who represent the central government. Only after destroying the power of the old system can the people build up a new system, and begin to rule themselves. In most cases, the officials are given warnings and told to leave their posts—it is when they refuse to leave and choose to fight that they are sometimes killed.

CHARGE: *The PCP has carried out selective assassinations of top military and civilian officials and has killed foreign development workers working on government projects.*

The top military and political leaders are direct and major oppressors of the people and carry out many crimes—and are therefore legitimate targets of the revolution. The infrastructure that development workers build and the projects they participate in serve the domination of foreign capital over Peru. And again, these people are warned before action is taken against them in most cases.

CHARGE: *The PCP has boycotted elections, threatened and assassinated candidates, and intimidated voters.*

The PCP opposes elections because of their view that elections under the current system have nothing to do with making any significant decisions for or by the oppressed, and because elections are part of how the current system justifies its rule (until the recent coup and the canceling of the constitution, that is). The candidates have been treated the same as other political leaders, mentioned just above.

CHARGE: *Amnesty International says it "continues to receive reports of the torture and killing of captives."*

The actual policies of the PCP toward captured enemy soldiers follow those developed in the Chinese Revolution. *El Diario Internacional* No. 11 reprinted an article from the magazine *Sí*, which is hostile to the revolution. In it, *Sí* described how captured rank and file soldiers were given a choice between joining up with the People's Guerrilla Army, or simply returning to their lives. Captured officers are treated more harshly, and sometimes tried for crimes they have committed. These policies should be compared to the vicious policies of the Peruvian armed forces toward the civilian population (not to speak of the captured guerrilla fighters, who are almost always tortured and killed), which we have already described.

CHARGE: *The PCP conducts "mock trials" which are a travesty of justice.*

What AI calls "mock trials" are in fact mass gatherings in which peasants mete out revolutionary justice to landlords, local tyrants—or others who have enforced bitterly repressive semi-feudal relations—or representatives of the central government. AI considers such trials a travesty of justice, but in fact these trials represent the genuine political will of the oppressed in the countryside. AI's bias is indeed profound. The Peruvian justice system, which has repeatedly rubber-stamped the massacres of whole villages, and which sanctions things like the May 1992 mass murder of political prisoners in Canto Grande, is seen as somehow inherently legitimate (if sometimes flawed). On the other hand, popular trials carried out by peasants in a village after they have overthrown the local tyrants are seen as completely illegitimate and as horrifying examples of violations of basic human rights.

What could be "clean" about Peruvian counterrevolution?

At the beginning of the November 1991 pamphlet on Peru, there is a statement of the basic principles of Amnesty International. In the middle of this is the statement: "Amnesty International is impartial. It does not support or oppose any government or political system, nor does it support or oppose the views of the prisoners whom it seeks to protect. It is concerned solely with the protection of the human rights involved in each case, regardless of the ideology of the government or the beliefs of the victim."

On page 14 of the AI pamphlet, we find: "Amnesty International does not question the right of the Peruvian Government to conduct counterinsurgency operations against armed opposition groups. The difficulty faced by the Peruvian security forces in combating violent opposition groups is fully recognized by the organization. However, it is precisely in these circumstances that governments must act with extra vigilance to protect human rights, in order to ensure that the actions of armed opposition groups are not used to justify human rights violations by the security forces."

It would seem that there is a screaming contradiction here. On the one hand, AI says that it is impartial in terms of social systems, and on the other it does not even question the right of the Peruvian state to enforce its system by violence against any and all armed opposition groups! Yet *nowhere do you find a hint from AI that the oppressed have the right to seek relief from impossible conditions by rising up and making revolution*. This is not an isolated slip of the pen, or a lapse by AI. Rather, this contradiction underlies the whole approach of AI to Peru, including AI's claim that the peasantry of Peru is "caught between two fires," [14](#) that is, the viciousness of the government and the viciousness of the people's war. There is a peculiar mix of prejudice and illusion in the AI approach to Peru, which we need to disentangle.

The most basic question in a war is, "whose interests are served?" The government in Peru sits as enforcer in an international network of profit making. An elite sitting in corporate boardrooms in the U.S. is the prime beneficiary. (And no small beneficiary we might add. It was estimated in 1960 that over one half of the capitalist economy in Peru was directly owned by U.S. companies. Today, while the situation has changed in some ways, and some of the forms of ownership are less direct, the relationship is basically the same.) For the people of Peru, this arrangement has meant violence, starvation, malnutrition, mangled lives. Look at the example of the fishing industry: in 1990, 76,000 children died in Peru before their first birthday due to extreme poverty, while much of the catch from Peru's fishing industry was shipped to the U.S. in the form of *cat food*. In the U.S., cats eat better than many Peruvian children. The basic standard of living of the Andean peasantry, in terms of necessities like food, shelter, etc., is lower now than it was 500 years ago when the Spanish conquered Peru.

Conditions are in many ways more desperate today than ever, after a long period of immense U.S. capital investment in Peru since World War II. The 1991 cholera epidemic was the first in Latin America in decades; thousands died from a disease which comes from a breakdown in society's ability to provide safe water and effective sewage systems for the people. UNICEF estimates that 46 percent of Peruvian children under the age of 12, and that is more than 3 million, have to work to survive. Of these, over 320,000 live on the street, totally abandoned. Almost 70 percent of all children under age six suffer from malnutrition. To give just a brief glimpse of the state of the Peruvian economy, the inflation rate in 1990 was 7,649.7 percent, and unemployment and under-employment affected 88 percent of the Economically Active Population. [15](#) Can anyone deny that the Peruvian government wages counterinsurgency war in order to continue to enforce the basic economic relations which have kept the lives of the majority of Peruvians desperate for centuries and are now making them impossible? How could such a war possibly be considered "clean?"

The violence of the Peruvian state defends the current world order. It is aimed at holding down the oppressed and indigenous sections of the population, and middle class sections that rebel against foreign domination. This is why the counterinsurgency forces, as AI has exposed, engage in systematic torture and rape. This is why the government uses methods like massacring whole villages. This kind of repression isn't new. It has gone on for many centuries. Especially those who have risen up in rebellion have been viciously suppressed, from the days of Pizarro to the present. The dominant foreign power has changed from Spain in the beginning to the U.S. today, but the extraction of wealth from the backbreaking labor of the people, and the wielding of armed force backed by foreign powers to keep people in their place remains the same. [16](#) What is new about the situation today is that the people's war led by the PCP has developed the political strength, organization and methods of fighting which allow the oppressed to meet the most vicious attacks by the government and its U.S. backers—and continue to advance their struggle. Because of this, that struggle has advanced far beyond anything in the history of Peru.

The challenge for people who want to stand against oppression in Peru is to refuse to accept government propaganda, and to set aside the prejudice that can go along with living in relative privilege in the modern neocolonial empires of Europe and America. Only in this way is it possible to see what the revolution in Peru is really about and what it is really doing, and to support the basic interests of the great majority of the people of Peru.

Revolution is not a dinner party—but it is profoundly liberating

We have touched on the distorted method of AI. its overall mischaracterization of the

some key specific "themes" of the U.S.'s propaganda offensive against the people's war, and you can see echoes of these "themes" in the AI report, and in AI's work around Peru. Some of these key points: the charge that the revolution as a matter of policy and basic approach kills everyone "in the middle" who does not thoroughly support the revolution; the charge that the PCP gratuitously kills members of the parties of Peru's legal left, a charge concentrated in the sensational treatment of the killing of the vice mayor of the Lima shantytown of Villa El Salvador, María Elena Moyano; the charge that the revolution is aiming to militarily destroy religion, represented by the sensational treatment of attacks on some priests.

The most basic answer to the charge that they kill everyone who doesn't thoroughly support the revolution is that it is ludicrous, very much like the charge that they advance by a reign of terror over the masses. The "people in the middle," the ones not in active support of either side, are exactly the people that the revolution has increasingly won over to active support as it has advanced across the country. Why should the PCP kill the people who are future supporters?

To dig more deeply into this question, you have to start with the fact that there is a war on in Peru, concentrated in the countryside, which is taking the form of a struggle between two sections of the people. On the one side are the landlords, their armed henchmen, and more generally, the political parties and officials who back up the semi-feudal order. On the other side, the former victims, who have boldly challenged the backward social order, its network of informers and snitches, the Peruvian military (and increasingly the U.S. Green Berets), and are engaged in a life and death struggle against a military force which vastly outnumbers and has much more powerful weaponry than the revolutionary army. The fighting has proceeded, especially in areas of the strength of the revolution, through "encirclement and suppression campaigns." The Peruvian army tries to surround and recapture revolutionary base areas, while the revolutionary army seeks the ways to gain the initiative while under attack, defeat the encirclement, and expand the areas under its control. Some areas have gone back and forth many times; these are the areas where the army carries out massacres. [17](#)

Of course, in such a situation there are no doubt people who wish that they lived somewhere else—and no doubt some who will talk of things like being caught between the PCP and the Peruvian army. But the far more important point to understand is that in the face of the Peruvian army's superior firepower and relatively advanced technology, backed up by U.S. spy satellites and surveillance planes, and complemented by hundreds of private mercenaries, the revolutionary army could not advance and retake its base areas *unless it had the active support of large sections of the peasants*. The charges that

should not be any revolution at all.

A closely related question is the charge that the revolution is *strategically* based on terrorizing the *middle classes* in Peru, especially those in the cities who are not large capitalists or agents and appendages of foreign capital, but who have a position above the poor peasants and the workers and shantytown people in the cities. This raises an important question about the basic strategy of the PCP.

The AI pamphlet characterizes the goals of the PCP this way:

The aim of this group is to establish a worker-peasant state through a prolonged rural insurgency, gradually extending throughout the country to encircle the urban areas, and through the destruction of the local apparatus of the state's authority in preparation for setting up its own systems of control. [18](#)

While the alliance of the workers and peasants is the most fundamental alliance in the revolution, this statement distorts the strategy of the revolution. Chairman Gonzalo puts the strategy this way:

We think that Peru is a semifeudal and semicolonial society in which bureaucratic capitalism has developed. Therefore, the revolution is a democratic one. We think that the democratic revolution must confront three mountains: imperialism, mainly Yankee imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, and semifeudalism. This democratic revolution demands that we undertake a people's war. That is why we have insisted on this course . . . This democratic revolution must be followed immediately by a socialist revolution. [19](#)

In this process, Chairman Gonzalo outlines the different classes and their role:

In accordance with these criteria of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, our goal is a front of classes, with the proletariat as the leading class, the peasantry as the main force, the petty bourgeoisie as an ally which we must pay attention to, and in particular the intellectuals, because they are necessary to the revolution, as Chairman Mao also taught us. And in this front, under certain circumstances and conditions, even the national bourgeoisie can and does participate. This is what we understand by the united front. [20](#)

The point is this: the PCP has the strategic aim of uniting a very broad front of classes in

does not target these forces—it targets what Gonzalo called "the three mountains." The underlying point is that there are many broad "middle class" forces in Peru whose basic interests demand the changes the PCP is aiming at—wrenching Peru free from semifeudalism and from foreign imperialist domination. The PCP seeks to win over these people by political means, as well as by advancing the strength of the revolution overall. One concrete example of how the PCP deals with this is the role of merchants in the base areas. The merchants are not eliminated, but are allowed to operate as their functions are necessary for the development of the economy as it exists. There are restrictions put on things like how much profit they can make, however. *El Diario Internacional* (November-December 1991) uses this example:

. . . [T]he commissioner of economy and production in a People's Committee is charged with ensuring that the small businessmen who come in to sell fertilizer are limited to a 30 percent profit rate. Before, these products were marketed at a profit rate of up to 300 percent, which made it impossible for the peasants to plant anything other than coca.

María Elena Moyano: Revolution and counterrevolution in the shantytowns of Lima

The assassination of María Elena Moyano has recently been one of the key focal points of an effort by the international and Peruvian press to drive wedges between the people's war and sections of the left and of the progressive people around the world. AI has jumped into this controversy, including, for example, putting out a leaflet in Berkeley after the recent coup which focussed most of its attention on the Moyano incident. The basic picture painted by the mainstream press is that Moyano was a political leader of the shantytowns, a woman who administered "glass of milk" programs which gave milk to children in the shantytown of Villa El Salvador. It is said that she incurred the wrath of the PCP because she criticized the revolution for "terrorism," and heroically dared to stand up to their threats. For this, the story goes, she was killed by the PCP.

The truth about Moyano is that she was a member of a political party, the MAS (Movement for Socialist Affirmation), and that had positions in Fujimori's cabinet. She was an active defender of the government, and actively worked with the police against the revolution. According to letters from the political prisoners massacred by the Peruvian government in May 1992, Moyano played a role in fingering at least 15 revolutionaries to the police, revolutionaries who were then killed. At the end of her life, she was involved in organizing urban *rondas* with the aim of beginning armed attacks on the revolution. It is not hard to see why many high officials of Fujimori's government attended her funeral. [21](#)

target of the revolution, that people who collude with the forces of repression suppress the ability of the masses to make revolution, to be active politically, and to ultimately achieve liberation.

Anyone who sees what happened to her and thereby draws the conclusion that anyone who has differences with the PCP will be killed is falling for the government's propaganda. It is in fact the Peruvian government that randomly kills people for bad ideas, or for nothing at all—because instilling terror in the population as a whole is how the government maintains its rule and fights its war. It is the Peruvian government, not the PCP, that is so shaky and so unstable that it is afraid of every "rustling of leaves in the wind," and lashes out at people who dare to even voice support for the revolution. (This is the case with the many journalists who have been jailed or even killed, and it is especially the case with the newspaper *El Diario*, which the government has hounded—imprisoning and killing its reporters and one of its editors, Janet Talavera, and driving the other editor, Luis Arce Borja, out of the country. This is seen even more powerfully in the case of the Canto Grande prisoners themselves, who were massacred in May 1992 in large part for the "crime" of being organized and studying in prison, and for defiantly continuing to uphold and propagate their politics and acting as a sort of "voice of the revolution" to the outside world. Among the prisoners killed were members of the Association of Democratic Lawyers, who had been thrown in jail merely for defending the revolutionaries.)

It is worth looking a little deeper at the stark reality—Moyano was a big champion of using money from the church and from international aid agencies to feed glasses of milk to hungry children. But she turned over to the police for torture and murder the parents of those same children when they were working to put an end to the conditions that cause children to die of starvation. Her approach reinforced and strengthened the current order—and she herself feared and opposed the people in the shantytowns themselves taking control. *El Diario Internacional* noted: "The objective [of the glass of milk programs] is to maintain an impoverished mass of people as beggars—without a critical spirit, without the will to fight, not thinking of anything higher than the next plate of food to be dispensed. Behind this 'charity' and 'donations' of food is hidden the true causes of hunger and misery for millions of Peruvians." [22](#)

In stark contrast, in the shantytowns where it has influence, the PCP leads the people themselves to administer justice, develop collective gardens and share the produce, and form mass mobilizations to fight against the government's attempts to evict and control the shantytown. For example, one of the "crimes" of the residents of the shantytown of Raucana, accused of being controlled by the PCP, was that they rejected the Peruvian

survive only by instilling terror in the people, whether in the cities or the countryside.

The priest at war—the case of "Father Mariano"

Another reactionary campaign waged in the Western press has been designed to make the PCP look like the brutal assassin of the religious aspirations of the people (and in doing so, to drive a wedge between the people's war in Peru and those progressive religious forces in the U.S. who have opposed Yankee aggression in the Third World). *El Diario Internacional* noted that "the Church and the government have unleashed a frenzied campaign, which, in precisely the style of the holy crusades of antiquity, attempts to accuse the guerrillas of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) of targeting the Church as a military objective." [24](#) Amnesty repeats some of the charges that have been central to this campaign, again doing the propaganda work of a counterinsurgency campaign.

Let's look briefly at what is involved in this campaign, examining the work of Father Mariano, whose situation is probably the most widely publicized case of the PCP's supposed atrocities against religion. Father Mariano is an American missionary to Peru, working in the Ene River Valley in the Peruvian jungle. The area is a tribal area, where the largest remaining grouping of Indian people in Peru, the Asháninka, live. The area has been a center of sharp struggle between revolution and the forces of the Peruvian government. Father Mariano is still alive, but he is reportedly under a death threat by the revolution for his work. The story portraying him as a valiant padre, risking his life to save the Asháninka, was given full treatment in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, [25](#) and was repeatedly written about in *Caretas*, one of the main Peruvian news weeklies.

However, it seems that the valiant *padre* is a very active counterinsurgency fighter. The range of his activities that have been reported in *Caretas* alone is summed up by *El Diario Internacional*:

Father Mariano is an active organizer of the civil defense groups managed by the army in this region. He maintains direct contact with the U.S. embassy in Lima; he moves about the vast jungle in powerful American helicopters. He has the permanent support of the zone's military garrison. He has permanent communication via high-powered radio with the base at Mazamari (training center for the National Police's anti-subversive units). The priest forced the Asháninka to build an airstrip in Cutivireni for the landing of American troops. [26](#)

It is telling that this is the most famous and publicized priestly "victim" of the PCP. His story reveals a piece of the larger picture of the active mobilization of the church (and particularly foreign missionaries). in the service of counterrevolution. From what we

have been targeted. The vast majority of priests, and more basically, the people's right to religious beliefs (which are explicitly upheld in the PCP's Programme) have not been the focus of attack in any way, though the PCP has certainly made clear its own atheist views and teaches Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in the schools in the areas it has liberated. Given the oppressive history of the Christian missionaries in Latin America, Protestant and Catholic, up to the present day, it is no wonder that even in the attempts to brand the PCP as vicious opponents of the religious feelings of the people, it is the shameless role of some priests and sections of the church hierarchy as active counterinsurgents that stands out.

A final point on why the "human rights" offensive of the U.S. government should be opposed and rejected

In early May, the Peruvian government attacked the political prisoners and prisoners of war in Canto Grande prison. The government killed over 40 and severely wounded over 100. [27](#) This attack on these prisoners does in a sense symbolize the battle between revolution and counterrevolution in Peru. The attack did take some of the steam out of the "human rights" offensive of the U.S. government, if only for a while. Amnesty International did condemn the prison massacre, and issue a human rights alert. But overall, there has been a remarkable lack of widespread condemnation of what is undeniably a great crime. Why have their deaths been seen as justified, or at the very least, no big deal? This is significantly due to the effect of the "human rights" offensive of the U.S. government, and the role that organizations like AI have played in backing this offensive up and giving it their enthusiastic blessing.

The people's war in Peru started with nothing, has gone up against immense odds, and has become an increasing challenge to the "New World Order." Massive U.S. intervention is a looming threat. One way or another, the U.S. government will be compelled to act on its fevered calculations and make a decisive military move against the revolution. Those who take the stand that AI is taking and who participate in the distortions and vilification of the revolution under the guise of "human rights" are not "neutral"—they are objectively giving active assistance to U.S. preparations for intervention. Members of AI who do not want to be part of that, but want to be part of paving the way for *opposition to U.S. intervention* in Peru should work to change the stand of AI on Peru, including to reverse the decision to focus criticism on revolution made in Japan in the fall of 1991. For those who say that they do not know enough to take a stand, there is a growing body of literature available in the U.S. which clarifies the nature of the struggle in Peru, and brings out the views of the PCP and of supporters of the revolution. [28](#)

anyway. No one with a shred of conscience should tolerate assisting the Yankee intervention in any way. And anyone with the vision and daring to see beyond the confines of the "New World Order" should support the genuine people's war in Peru.

Notes:

1. Charles Lane, "The Newest War," *Newsweek* (Jan. 6, 1992). Another indication of the kind of U.S. presence that is being set up is the presence of Anthony Quainton as U.S. ambassador to Peru. He was the ambassador to Nicaragua when the Contras were started and when the CIA mined Nicaragua's harbors. He was also the ambassador to Kuwait in the later 1980s, at a time of intense crisis in the Iran/Iraq war—when Kuwaiti tankers carried U.S. flags in what amounted to a high-stakes, and potentially nuclear, challenge to both Iran *and* to the Soviet Union.
2. Simon Strong, "Peru is Losing More Than the Drug War," *New York Times* (Feb. 16, 1992)
3. One small but revealing example of how exposed the "war on drugs" has become is the rise of Vladimiro Montesinos in the Peruvian government. Montesinos is Fujimori's personal counselor, main liaison to the Peruvian intelligence services, and one of his key political advisors. He is considered by some "the leading advocate for the coup." Montesinos is notorious in Peru because he was a lawyer for the major kingpins of the coca trade; he was also thrown out of the Peruvian army in part because of charges he was working for the CIA. According to reports, the Bush administration has kept quiet about Montesinos' role because he is still working for the CIA. (See "Peruvian adviser has drug cartel ties," *San Jose Mercury News* [April 19, 1992], and "Peru's Man Behind the Throne Gets Unwelcome Limelight," *Wall Street Journal* [May 8, 1992])
4. See the instructive discussion of the tremendous difficulties the U.S. faces in stopping the revolution, as analyzed by a counterinsurgency expert at the RAND Corporation, in Gordon H. McCormick, *From the Sierra to the Cities, the Urban Campaign of the Shining Path* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1992).
5. "Amnesty group to stress abuses by rebel factions," *Detroit Free Press* (Sept. 9, 1991)
6. For a very instructive account of how the FBI carried out a major nationwide campaign utilizing this kind of justification against the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, see Ross Gelbspan, *Break-ins, Death Threats, and the FBI: The Covert War Against the Central America Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).
7. Amnesty Action (Jan.–Feb., 1992)
8. Statement of Bernard Aronson, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, March 12, 1992: ". . . the international community, and respected human rights organizations, must focus the spotlight of world attention on the threat which Sendero poses. I am not suggesting that the Peruvian government get a pass on human rights. They should not and will not."

Hemisphere Affairs, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, March 12, 1992.

10. *Interview with Chairman Gonzalo*, conducted by the editors of *El Diario* newspaper; trans. Committee to Support the Revolution in Peru (Berkeley: CSRP, 1991), p. 33

11. *New York Times* (Sept. 7, 1984)

12. The AI report consistently uses "Sendero Luminoso," which is not the name the PCP uses. When the report does try to say what the real name is, it says "The full title of the group is: Communist Party of Peru on the Shining Path of the Thought of Jose Carlos Mariátegui." This is not true. The title is: Communist Party of Peru.

13. AI, "Peru: Human Rights in a Climate of Terror," p. 19.

14. "Caught between two fires" is presented in the AI pamphlet as if it represents the innocent and spontaneous cry of a "peasant victim of violence." In fact, the phrase has been used for years by the legal leftist parties in Peru, and it is used to attack the revolution by comparing it to the notorious viciousness of the government.

15. *Periodico Noticias de IU*, quoted in "The Prospect of Power for the People's War in Peru" a presentation by Luis Arce Borja, Editor of *El Diario* newspaper.

16. A recent and little-known example (little-known in the U.S., anyway) of U.S. military intervention in Peru came in the 1960s, when the CIA played a major role in putting down guerrillas inspired by the Cuban revolution. (See Victor Marchetti and John Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* [New York: 1975], p. 137)

17. See, for example, the discussion of the Cayara massacre in the AI report, in the section "Concealing the truth with impunity," starting on p. 44.

18. "Peru: Human rights in a climate of terror," p. 23

19. *Interview with Chairman Gonzalo*, pp. 73–74

20. *Ibid.*, p. 71

21. For an in-depth analysis of the role of Moyano, see *El Diario Internacional* No. 12 (April 1992), pp 10–18

22. *El Diario Internacional* No. 12, p. 12

23. See the video "Shantytowns and Prisons in Peru: The Revolution Advances," distributed by the CSRP, for a revealing view of the struggle in the shantytown of Raucana.

24. *El Diario Internacional* (Aug.–Sept. 1991), p. 3

25. *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (Dec. 2, 1990)

26. *El Diario Internacional* No. 10, p. 8

27. Letter from surviving prisoners, May 14, 1992. This letter has been circulated internationally.

28. The literature of the PCP, as well as other important materials about the revolution, is available through the CSRP.